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Bartlett, B. (2019) "It happens by accident": failed intentions, incompetence, and sincerity in badfilm. In: Mathijs, E. and Sexton, J. (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Cult Cinema*. Series: Routledge media and cultural studies companions. Routledge: London, pp. 40-50. ISBN 9781138950276

(doi:[10.4324/9781315668819-6](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315668819-6))

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Deposited on: 8 January 2020

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## **“It happens by accident”: Failed intentions, incompetence, and sincerity in badfilm**

### **Introduction**

Badness is a well-established characteristic of cult cinema. Although cult films are frequently thematically or aesthetically innovative, they can also be bad – even simultaneously (Mathijs and Mendik 2008: 2). Badness can manifest in various, sometimes overlapping ways: cult films can be aesthetically or morally bad, critically disreputable or in “bad taste,” or belong to “illegitimate” genres like pornography. With cult films traditionally positioned in opposition to the “mainstream,” badness can be transgressive, challenging standards and conventions of taste, style and quality. This chapter examines films that are identified, distinguished, and potentially valued for their incompetence and technical failure – a category known as badfilm. This is less a thematic category than a stylistic one, with films appreciated for deviance born from a “systematic failure... to *obey* dominant codes of cinematic representation” (Sconce 1995: 385). Badfilms are those in which viewers can recognise, or claim to recognise, the failed intention to achieve certain standards of cinematic representation.

Although theoretically the failure to achieve the desired result is not restricted to any particular type of cinema, only a small proportion of badfilms have gained cult status, becoming known as the “worst films of all time.” These are often, but not exclusively, low-budget American science-fiction and horror films, particularly from the 1950s and 60s. As a period in which classical Hollywood style was the dominant narrative form, bad movie fans can identify the failure to achieve such standards with relative ease through a familiarity with categorical and stylistic conventions that were prevalent then and continue to be commonplace today. It was also a period of significant change for the industry and several

factors, including the collapse of the studio system, enabled independent filmmakers like Edward D Wood Jr (*Plan 9 From Outer Space*, 1956), Vic Savage (*The Creeping Terror*, 1964), Coleman Francis (*The Beast of Yucca Flats*, 1961), and Phil Tucker (*Robot Monster*, 1953) to flourish on the fringes of Hollywood. These filmmakers, and others, are today celebrated for their failures. Although immediately recognisable as films of a certain time and place, their badness remains as visible as ever. Furthermore, historical and contemporary badfilms can be, and are, analysed in similar ways; internal incoherence and consistently inconsistent style due to failed intentions are not restricted to a specific time or place.

### **Critical and historical perspectives**

Badfilm appreciation can be traced back to the Surrealists, who believed the “worst” films could also be sublime. Although Pauline Kael, writing in the 1960s, lamented the critical prioritisation of “art” films, arguing that “most of the movies we enjoy are not works of art” (1994: 89), cult appreciation for bad movies was not truly visible until *The Fifty Worst Films of All Time* (Medved and Medved: 1978) and its influential successor, *The Golden Turkey Awards* (1980). Echoing Kael, the authors observe that “people show greater enthusiasm in laughing together over films they despise than in trying to praise the films they admire,” adding “absolutely anyone can recognise a lousy film when he [sic] sees one” (1978: 9).

The “awards” format adopted by the Medveds is typical of fan-authored bad movie literature, allowing a broad selection of films to be included within a single text. Like cult cinema generally, definitions of bad movies are vague. While some authors provide lists of examples (Sconce 1995) or different categories of badness (Medved 1978; Sauter 1995), badfilms also feature in “trash,” “psychotronic,” or “cult” encyclopaedias and reference guides (Peary 1981; Weldon 1983; Juno and Vale 1986). The search for the “worst film of all

time” continues to this day. This may be a personal endeavour (Adams 2003) or a relatively large-scale, publicised event such as the Golden Raspberry Awards (Razzies), which tends towards big-budget Hollywood films deemed “undeserving” of box office success. IMDb’s Bottom 100, meanwhile, is based on user ratings and features a combination of established badfilms – *Plan 9* and *The Room* (2003) are notable exceptions – and an ever-changing selection of contemporary titles that are predominantly American, Turkish, or Indian productions.

Extrinsic factors, including a film’s existing reputation, its availability, and the viewer’s individual position can affect how badness is interpreted and understood. Mark Jancovich, for example, argues the eclectic selection of films featured in *Incredibly Strange Films*, as well as the authors’ fan status, led to frequently contradictory reading strategies being employed, with the films discussed in terms ranging from “virtual contempt” to “patronising affection” and “awe-filled admiration” (2002: 314). This inconsistency is typical, indicating the diversity of both cinematic badness and subsequent cult appreciation.

Taste, constructed and influenced by factors including social status, education, and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), and subjectivity also play a role in badfilm appreciation. Valuing badness can appear to challenge the established taste culture: Mathijs writes, for example, that “when bad films are hailed – tongue in cheek or not – as masterpieces... notions of what counts as ‘good’ are problematized” (2009: 366; see also Sconce 1995). MacDowell and Zborowski offer a “flat repudiation” of this position, arguing that describing badfilms as masterpieces “can only *ever* be on some level ‘tongue in cheek,’ and, thus, scarcely threatening to even the most traditional standards of aesthetic evaluation” (2013: 23). The Medveds, for example, discuss their bad movie fandom in terms implying taboo activities, but rarely suggest radicalism: as Jancovich notes, they more often support the established taste culture than oppose it (2002: 313). The Medveds are deviants only in that

they get a “kick” out of watching bad movies, indicating a distinction between *identifying* badness and *valuing* it. However, rather than reject Mathijs’ claim entirely, I suggest some clarification is required. His comments refer to the broad category of bad films, which here includes the varied output of Doris Wishman, Mario Bava, and Todd Haynes, among others. MacDowell and Zborowski, meanwhile, are discussing badfilms, those specifically characterised and identified by technical incompetence and failed intentions. This small but significant distinction indicates the importance of acknowledging the variety of ways in which badness is identified and analysed.

J Hoberman’s article, “Bad Movies,” represents an early attempt to identify films that “transcend taste and might be termed *objectively bad*” (1980: 8). An objectively bad movie, he argues, draws the viewer’s attention away from its plot to its construction, with the visible artifice of the filmmaking process creating a heightened sense of realism. Crucially, this dismantling of the diegesis is unintentional, caused by the failed attempts to reproduce “institutional modes of representation” (1980: 8). Hoberman proposes the “best” bad movies are made in restrictive conditions, often rooted in exploitation, and contain auteurist signatures that enable the viewer to identify, or claim to identify, a filmmaker’s sincere determination to complete their film against all odds. Although weakened by a failure to adequately consider the impact of intention (1980: 22), Hoberman’s claims regarding the “best” bad movies still resonate – many cult badfilms meet his criteria, suggesting both a certain mode of production likely to result in objective badness, and a specific mode of reception created as a result.

Badfilm fandom became more visible throughout the 80s and 90s, due largely to the Medveds’ books and, later, the cult television programme *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (1988-99). As well as providing audiences an opportunity to experience films they may have only read about before, *MST3K*’s format created the illusion of a shared viewing environment

(a diegetic audience and the viewer watching television at home) and directed viewers towards a specific reading of the films that prioritised the identification, and subsequent mocking, of badness. This appreciation is described as “cinemasochism,” whereby fans find “pleasure in cinema others have deemed too painful to endure” (Carter 2011: 102). Cinemasochism, like Sconce’s “paracinema” (1995), is an ironic reading strategy not dissimilar to Susan Sontag’s conception of camp (1966), which champions artifice and exaggeration, and celebrates badness, particularly when it appears to be naïve or unintentional.

Although Sconce describes paracinema as an “elastic textual category” (1995: 372), it is best thought of as a particular interpretive strategy adopted by cult fans who position themselves in opposition to “mainstream” tastes; like camp, there is a distinction between paracinematic films and paracinematic sensibilities. Sconce initially proposes (1995: 387) that the paracinematic audience is “the one group of viewers that does concentrate exclusively on the ‘non-diegetic aspects of the image’.” In subsequent work, however, he argues badfilms “compel *even the most complacent viewer* into adopting a reading position marked by that rare combination of incredulous amazement and critical detachment [my emphasis]” (2003: 21), suggesting this is not necessarily a strategy employed by viewers but one encouraged by the films themselves. Badfilms can be “thought-provoking, if only because you were made to wonder how they’d ever been made” (Adams 2010: 4). Faced with such overwhelming failure and incompetence, viewers are thus encouraged to look beyond the filmic text as a way of understanding what they are witnessing.

In academia, badfilms are firmly positioned within cult studies. Consequently, the emphasis has been on the audience, with textual analysis largely being left to fans. Perhaps the characteristics of badfilm are simply so obvious that they have been taken for granted within scholarly writing. However, although some fans are capable of employing a range of

sophisticated reading strategies, fan-authored literature tends to comprise synopsis-based reviews rather than detailed analysis, and not all the information is reliable. For example, William Routt identifies some of the erroneous or misleading claims made about Wood and his films (2001: 3), acknowledging the irony that “criticism that depends so strongly on the identification of gaffes should itself be so riddled with them.” The academic tendency towards reception studies is understandable – the value of badfilms is most obviously located in the ways cult fans use the texts – but Justin Smith suggests the critical task for the academy now “must be to see if it is possible to find textual evidence for cult affiliation” (2013: 109). The focus on reception means there have been few attempts to analyse how badness is identified and how it functions within the text.

Recent efforts to address these gaps tend to focus on films that are “so bad they’re good,” a phrase effectively demonstrating the tensions so often at play in simultaneously recognising, valuing, and enjoying badness. Taken literally, “so bad it’s good” is problematic and paradoxical, but it is generally understood that “good” in this context is “almost exclusively used to refer to how humorous something is, as opposed to any other laudable artistic qualities” (McCulloch 2011: 195). MacDowell and Zborowski propose “so bad it’s pleasurable” as a more accurate description, arguing this “does justice to the fact that no claim is being advanced for a text’s intrinsic value... but rather its potential instrumental value as an object of fascination or fun” (2013: 17). Similar assertions can be found elsewhere. Hoberman suggests the Medveds’ initial “worst films” selection did not develop cult status because “few are bad enough to be pleasurable” (1980: 9), while Sconce distinguishes between the “paracinematic pleasure” a film like *Glen or Glenda* (1953) can evoke and Larry Buchanan’s “bleak and sombre” films that induce only a “profound feeling of desperation, anxiety and terminal boredom” (1995: 389-90).

Although Sconce does not explicitly use the term, his descriptions indicate the distinction between films considered to be “so bad they’re good” and films that are “*just* bad,” the former a pleasurable experience, the latter not. The challenge is to consider what textual characteristics might result in a film being considered “so bad it’s good/ pleasurable.” Focusing on the “so,” MacDowell and Zborowski argue it can be “strange, entertaining, and perversely thrilling simply to experience such an overwhelming quantity of failed intentions” (2013: 18), suggesting there is evidence of so *much* badness. A pleasurable badfilm is also one where the badness is so *obvious*. Badfilms expose incompetence and failure in a multitude of ways. Individual elements fail to convince and fail to support one another, indicating the films contain so *many different kinds* of badness. Badfilms most likely to be championed as “so bad they’re good” are those in which badness is excessive, obvious, and varied. Films that are “just bad,” in contrast, are often characterised by a leaden pace and lack of excess. This can be interpreted as absence of effort or ambition (see Sontag 2009: 283), which further hinders their potential to be transformed into objects of fun.

Over the years several films, including *The Room*, *Troll 2* (1990), and *Plan 9*, have been declared the “best-worst” movie: the ultimate “so bad it’s good” experience. Most badfilm fans probably have their own, inherently personal choice of “best-worst” film and could convincingly justify their selection. As “so bad it’s good” suggests, the greater the evidence of technical failure, the greater the potential for enjoyment. However, attempts to provide textual evidence for what is ultimately a taste judgement can be limited by the subjective nature of the filmic experience. Whether a film is described as “so bad it’s good” or “so bad it’s pleasurable,” the underlying assumption is that it *is* pleasurable. The textual excess of films considered to be “so bad they’re good” does have other potential value, however. The overwhelming failure in *Maniac* (1934) leads Sconce (2003) to argue for the pedagogical value of badfilm, for example. Furthermore, if future investigations are to



explore how failure functions within the text, “so bad they’re good” films can be particularly productive because they represent some of the most extreme, excessive, and obvious examples of incompetence.

This does not mean that declaring a film to be bad is only ever a subjective evaluation: it is possible to distinguish between identifying badness and valuing it.

Identifying failure – recognising a schism between the attempts to achieve certain results and the results themselves – is less a matter of taste than context. By stating a film fails in its intended aims, we make no claims about its instrumental value. Furthermore, “one need by no means attach the value of ‘good’ to conventions in order to make a judgement of ‘bad’ when they appear to be striven for and missed” (MacDowell and Zborowski 2013: 16).

Intentionality is a complex issue and central to the debate surrounding badfilm, but has only recently been considered. The remainder of this chapter explores intentionality in more detail.

### **Intentionality and authorship**

Badfilm literature indicates assumptions are frequently made regarding intentions. Alison Graham argues it is the “*appearance* of Wood’s intentions that so engages cult audiences – the perceived distance... between his desire to create compelling narratives and his inability to do so” (1991: 109). Sconce notes that counter-cinematic and paracinematic styles are distinguished from one another by the artistic intentions of the filmmaker, the former intentionally deviating from Hollywood classicism, the latter hindered by financial constraints and technical incompetence (1995: 384). Intention is crucial to badfilm identification precisely because “if we cannot assume that a film intended to achieve certain aims, then we cannot deem it ‘bad’ for failing in those aims” (MacDowell and Zborowski 2013: 5). Intention allows us to distinguish between “bad” films and badfilms – the former

deliberately ironic, the latter not. Indeed, “bad” films, such as Larry Blamire’s *Dark and Stormy Night* (2009), often demonstrate an acute knowledge of filmmaking conventions by intentionally flouting them for comic effect. The “badness” in such films is often well judged, with “bad” moments fully supported by the other elements, carefully placed to be most effective, and subtly acknowledged within the diegesis. The film’s textual qualities, therefore, encourage the audience to adopt an ironic viewing position.

Badfilms, in contrast, expose the failed intention to achieve certain standards. Examples of unintentional badness include: the fragmentation of the landscape in *The Beast of Yucca Flats*, rendering an important chase sequence entirely incomprehensible; the voice-over narrator’s claim that a victim was “horribly mangled” moments before the unblemished body is revealed in *Monster A-go Go* (1965); *Plan 9*’s UFOs wobbling across the screen on strings while accompanied by sound suggesting a smooth journey (and none of the characters remarking on the bizarre flight pattern). These moments, unsupported by the other filmic elements, limit the narrative’s immersive potential and draw attention to the film’s construction instead.

Reflecting on the complex concept of intention invites consideration of both how intentionality is identified and who, or what, is the subject of intention. The incompetence (failed intention) of badfilm is generally attributed to the filmmaker and, specifically, the director. Auteurist interpretations often underpin cult appreciation: Juno and Vale argue that badness is often the consequence of a “single person’s individual vision and quirky originality,” and evidence of creative, improvised solutions to problems largely caused by budgetary restrictions (1986: 5). Although the various duties undertaken by filmmakers like Ed Wood, Tommy Wiseau, or Sam Mraovich make claims of authorship more persuasive – Mraovich has twelve credits in *Ben & Arthur* (2002) including director, editor, producer, scriptwriter, and lead actor – auteur theory is not without its critics. Routt criticises how it has

been applied to Wood's filmography, for example, challenging the assumption that the "gap between intention and act is apparent only in what is bad about Wood's movies" (2001: 8) and suggesting the filmmaker's life, particularly his transvestism and alcoholism, is used in a "kind of bonehead auteurist fashion where the badness of the life is taken as evidence for the badness of the work" (2001: 2).

MacDowell and Zborowski provide the most comprehensive examination of intentionality in badfilm to date, and suggest it is not always beneficial to look to the filmmaker as a source of intention. They argue such an approach, "if offered in full earnest, could still capture only (a) what an author remembers intending, (b) what s/he intended consciously, and (c) what s/he is capable of articulating about his or her conscious intentions" (2013: 6). Furthermore, badfilm fans generally prioritise the perceived visibility of failed intentions within the film text even if the filmmaker's stated intentions appear to contradict the filmic evidence. Despite producer Sam Sherman claiming *Blood of Ghastly Horror* (1967), an incoherent film comprising several unrelated, uncompleted narratives, *wasn't designed* to make any sense (Konow 1998: 115), and Wiseau now maintaining *The Room* was always intended to be a black comedy, these claims are largely ignored by badfilm fans. It is only by assuming badfilms are *not* intended to be parodies or comedies that the audience is able to laugh at them in the way they so regularly do (MacDowell and Zborowski in McCulloch 2011: 196).

Comparing contemporary cult badfilm *Birdemic: Shock and Terror* (2010) and its sequel *Birdemic 2: The Resurrection* (2013) demonstrates how issues of intention and authorship can be further complicated if filmmakers embrace their films' cult status. *Birdemic*, a tribute to Hitchcock's *The Birds* with a strong environmentalist message, is incompetent throughout. The narrative structure and pace is inconsistent and incoherent, sound editing is terrible, dialogue is stilted and poorly delivered, acting is wooden, and the

attacking eagles and vultures are unconvincing, barely-moving GIFs. The film's tiny budget is revealed in every scene, exposed through writer-director-producer James Nguyen's attempt to tell a story that far outreaches his ability. *Birdemic* is demonstrably, objectively bad, its failed intentions unavoidably apparent.

Nguyen often appears resolutely oblivious to the reason for *Birdemic*'s cult success and the ironic temperament underpinning many of the questions posed to him in interviews (for example Eggertsen 2011), but concedes that "you cannot intentionally go out and make a cult movie... It happens by accident" (2011). More accurately, however, it is not possible to make a badfilm – a film characterised by failed intentions. Nonetheless, *Birdemic 2* is a blatant attempt to capitalise on the cult popularity of *Birdemic*, with its "success" depending on its ability to "replicate the 'failure' of its predecessor and evince the same essential authentic sincerity" (Hunter 2014: 490). However, although *Birdemic 2* is generally as cheap-looking and incompetent as Nguyen's initial effort, the "authentic sincerity" is called into question precisely because it replicates, repeats, and exaggerates the original film's failure. There is no evidence of any attempt to improve. As one reviewer on IMDb writes, "this movie is trying way too hard to be as terrible as the first one, and that effort completely ruins it. You can't intentionally repeat accidental mediocrity" (Debtman 2013). Further complicating matters, not all reviewers agree: there are as many celebrating *Birdemic 2*'s incompetence as those lamenting the film's lack of originality and intentional badness.

The mixed reception of *Birdemic 2* challenges Sontag's claim that the "one doesn't need to know the artist's private intentions. The work tells all" (2009: 282), indicating that the viewer's knowledge, or lack thereof, of *Birdemic* impacts their understanding and identification of intentionality. Films are rarely viewed in isolation, and it is precisely this fact that enables incompetence to be identified. Building on Umberto Eco's concept of the "intention of the text" and the importance of context, MacDowell and Zborowski argue that

our sense of the “intention of the text” is guided by its “relationship with pre-existing cultural forms and genres, and their attendant conventions. Such a relationship will often facilitate identification of, at a minimum, a text’s categorical intentions” (2013: 8). *Birdemic*’s categorical context strongly suggests it intends to be a horror-romance that adheres to the standards of cinematic representation and realism established in the classical continuity system. For the informed viewer however, the categorical context of *Birdemic 2* necessarily includes its predecessor, enabling it to be identified as a far more self-conscious, albeit still ineptly constructed, effort. Whereas *Birdemic* reveals the sincere, earnest intention to be *good*, its sequel reveals the attempt at parody (rather than homage) and the intention to be *cult*. This echoes Sontag’s concepts of “naïve” and “deliberate” camp: just as naïve camp is “satisfying” because it reveals a “seriousness that fails,” (2009: 283) unselfconscious badfilms expose the failed intention to be *taken seriously*.

### **Extratextual information**

Although attributing intentionality to the text rather than the author, as per Eco, has its benefits, the two sources are used interchangeably. Hunter, for example, argues that although contemporary “exploitation” films like *Snakes on a Train* (2006) are bad, “their intention is never, exactly, to be ‘good’” (2014: 483); later he describes the viewing experience of watching badfilms as going “against the grain of the director’s legible intentions” (489). This indicates intentionality may be variously attributed to both/ either film and filmmaker. The distinction between authorial and textual intent often appears to be related to the levels of extra- and inter-textual information at the viewer’s disposal. This represents a challenge to Eco’s approach, which discourages looking beyond the text, and aligns badfilm fans with Richard Rorty’s pragmatic assertion that *any* reading of a text will inevitably be influenced

by other information at the reader's disposal (1992: 105). In the case of older, less established badfilms from the 1950s and 60s, for example, a lack of information about filmmakers or production conditions can encourage intentionality to be repositioned onto the film texts instead of an author.

Discussing the pedagogical potential of badfilm, Sconce claims that an advantage of a badfilm like *Maniac* (1934) is that it “carries none of the critical baggage of a *Citizen Kane* nor the weighty reputation of... [a] director whose popular persona precedes the consumption of their work” (2003: 20). However, assuming contemporary audiences watch badfilms without any knowledge of their reputation is problematic, particularly in the age of the internet. Inevitably, extratextual information (whether accurate or not) can impact how informed viewers understand and approach film texts. This can be beneficial: Ed Wood was initially voted “worst director of all time” but, despite the incompetence of his early films, “the critical discourse... surrounding Wood has since shifted from bemused derision to active celebration” (Sconce 1995: 387-88). Wood is now considered a “unique talent” rather than a “hack” (388) and, as a result, certain films of his – notably *Glen or Glenda* – are discussed in far more sympathetic and interpretive ways than many other badfilms. As Robert Birchard has pointed out, however, the various texts surrounding Wood's films have “created a highly romanticised fable that prints legend with just enough verisimilitude to suggest it's all true” (1995: 450). Arguably, the amount of extratextual information available, and the way information has been used to appropriate and re-evaluate his films, is “unique,” rather than the contents of the films themselves.

The cult interest in certain contemporary badfilms, such as *The Room* and *Birdemic*, as well as the fact that the filmmakers are still alive, willing to be interviewed, and have embraced their films' cult status, leads to greater availability of extratextual information. However, such information, whether about “classic” or contemporary badfilms, is not always

reliable. *The Disaster Artist*, an account of *The Room*'s production co-written by actor Greg Sestero, effectively paints a picture of the filmmaker not dissimilar to the "romanticised fable" surrounding Wood. There are also numerous anecdotes used to understand badfilms that are directly contradicted by other trivia or by the film text itself. The jerky, disjointed editing in *Manos: The Hands of Fate* is still explained by a claim that the camera used could only shoot thirty-two seconds of footage at a time, despite at least two shots in the film being more than double this length. It is unlikely that Vic Savage really dropped *The Creeping Terror*'s sound reel in Lake Tahoe, but the story is still used to explain the film's excessive voice-over narration. As Mathijs notes, "the longer a film's reputation chronology becomes, or the longer its public visibility lasts (even if only in small fan communities), the more important extrinsic references... become in determining the meaning of a film and its reputation" (2005: 467). This, of course, does not mean the information at our disposal should be ignored. However, because the reputations of certain badfilms can result in an situation in which existing *claims* of badness replace detailed examination of *evidence* of badness, we should interrogate and challenge extra- and inter-textual information by returning to the film texts themselves: to use extrinsic references to inform, rather than influence, how badfilms are read.

## **Conclusion**

Watching a film that contains such overwhelming failure and ineptitude is frequently an unsettling experience, one that raises more questions than provides answers. How did a film so obviously terrible get made? How did it get released? Why would a filmmaker not only endorse and promote such a mess, but be proud of it? Furthermore, why is excessive, extreme failure so often a pleasurable experience; what makes a film "so bad it's good"? Badfilm

appreciation often begins with these questions, with the viewer desiring to explain what they have witnessed, to find a way of rationally understanding what is often an irrational, incoherent product. The starting position accepts the films are intrinsically, demonstrably bad. From here, individual taste determines our response to the films, which, because of their inherent incoherence and inconsistent style, can be ambiguous enough to allow for a multitude of interpretations. Badfilms can be appropriated as accidental art, as *Glen or Glenda* is today; they can be viewed as evidence of entrepreneurial graft and auteurist determination; they can reveal modes of production that are otherwise concealed in “good” films; they can be dismissed as “trash,” referenced only because they represent one end of the quality spectrum. The value and reception of badfilms is necessarily subjective, but the film text itself remains constant.

As interest in bad films – and badfilms – has increased, several useful avenues for further investigation have opened. Hunter, for example, relates badness to the “abject” and suggests a “phenomenology of bad film” might exist. This approach considers the paradoxical claims of badness-as-goodness in terms of experience, and indicates a way to conceive of a shared understanding of badness despite difference: “bad films, *both aesthetically incompetent and morally suspect ones*, can be genuinely disconcerting, for they enable entry into imaginative worlds where the usual criteria no longer seem to apply [my emphasis]” (Hunter 2014: 498). Alternatively, approaching the subcategory of badfilms from a position that addresses failed intentions shifts the core of the debate from reception back to the text itself. The narrative and stylistic incoherence and inconsistency of badfilms is revealed in strange and unusual ways that are distinct and different from both mainstream and art cinema precisely due to the appearance of failed intentions. Furthermore, MacDowell and Zborowski suggest that studying badfilm “forces us to return with renewed vigour and evidence to still-vital issues for aesthetics that we can often complacently presume to move



beyond” (2013: 24). When considering cult’s increasing commercialisation, leading to films that blur the line between “badness” and badness (the former intentional, the latter not), it has become necessary to further interrogate our understanding of subjective and objective badness including, though by no means limited to, failure and incompetence.

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